

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
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News Release



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Two Public Scoping Meetings for Upper Ouachita and Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuges Expansion

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will host two public scoping meetings to gather input on a proposal to link two national wildlife refuges, Felsenthal National Wildlife Refuge in Arkansas and Upper Ouachita National Wildlife Refuge in Louisiana.

If approved, the Service could purchase 46,064 additional acres only from willing sellers to ultimately allow for the conservation of more than 172,000 total acres and 58 river miles of wildlife habitat linking and expanding the two refuges.

As part of the America's Great Outdoors program, the Service seeks to conserve a large functional landscape for wildlife, ecosystem services, and historic and cultural resource protection and to provide the American public with outstanding recreational opportunities.

The Service is working with the states of Louisiana and Arkansas and a variety of public and private partners to propose expanding the acquisition boundaries. Upper Ouachita NWR is administered from North Louisiana Refuges with a current refuge boundary of 42,594 acres and an approved acquisition boundary of 60,699 acres, and Felsenthal NWR, administered from South Arkansas Refuges, is 65,000 acres. The total number of acres proposed for this landscape expansion includes 27,664 acres for Felsenthal NWR and 18,405 acres for Upper Ouachita NWR.

The meetings are scheduled for:

- Wednesday, July 6
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Crossett Economic Development Commission
400 Main Street
Crossett, AR
870/364-8745

- Thursday, July 7
6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m .

Bastrop Visitor Center
124 North Washington St.
Bastrop, LA 71220
318/281-0911

“We look forward to hearing from our neighbors on this exciting proposal,” said Bernie Petersen, project leader for the South Arkansas National Wildlife Refuge Complex. “The proposal can have an extremely positive effect on the ecosystem here, and allow increased hunting opportunities on a more intact and seamlessly managed refuge.”

If approved, the Service will draw funding for this land acquisition from the Migratory Bird Conservation Fund and the Land and Water Conservation Fund. These are not derived from traditional tax revenues, but are collected from the sale of Federal Duck Stamps, entrance fees from certain national wildlife refuges, and import duties on arms and ammunition (Migratory Bird Conservation Fund), and from the sale of offshore oil leases (Land and Water Conservation Fund). The money is intended for land conservation.

The Fish and Wildlife Service will acquire land from **willing sellers only**.

“While we have always worked with our fellow refuges, the expansion and direct linkage will really enhance the bottomland forests for the hundreds of thousands of waterfowl, the Louisiana black bears, and songbirds,” said Joe Saenz, Project Leader, North Louisiana Refuges Complex. “This also will provide increased hunting opportunities, fishing as well as wildlife observation and photography for everyone.”

Public comments will be used to guide the Service through the next step in the planning process. From August through October 2011, the Service will determine alternatives for the expansion, including specific locations and management options. The public will have a chance to review and comment on those alternatives as early as November. The planning team expects to send the Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service a final plan for approval in January 2012.

The states and federal government have parallel wildlife and habitat conservation goals in this area. This proposal helps combine these goals and the efforts of other partners into one larger, combined project conservation area that includes non- governmental and local organizations.

This proposal supports the states of Louisiana and Arkansas Comprehensive Conservation Strategies and Action Plans and complements the states’ landscape conservation efforts, the Red-Cockaded Woodpecker Recovery Plan, the Partners-In-Flight Initiative, and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Through Aug. 7, 2011, comments on the proposal may be provided by:

- E-mailing tina_chouinard@fws.gov Please include “Upper Ouachita – Felsenthal NWR Expansion” in the subject line
- Mailing to Tina Chouinard, Natural Resource Planner, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 3006 Dinkins Lane, Paris, TN 38242 Fax to 731/644 3351
- Attending a public scoping meeting and providing written or verbal comments.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov> and <http://www.fws.gov/southeast>.

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